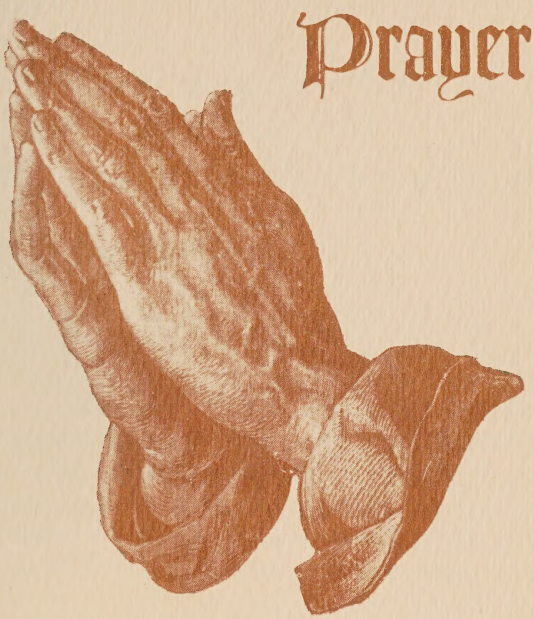
Fellowship in Prayer



"For a world united in prayer"

"A thousand experiences have convinced me beyond all doubt that prayer multiplies the strength of the individual, and brings within the scope of his capabilities almost any conceivable objective."

— Dwight D. Eisenhower

Volume X DECEMBER, 1959 Number 6

OUR PURPOSE

To promote the practice of prayer among *all* religious faiths whose fundamental belief is in God, regardless of race, creed, or color, and whose tenets include the universal attributes of truth, honesty, justice and mercy, that thereby there may arise a closer relation to Almighty God and a deeper spirit of fellowship among mankind.

FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

22 E. 29th Street New York 16, N.Y.

Volume X December, 1959 Number 6

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

SYMBOL OF ETERNAL LIFE

The Star of Bethlehem is the symbol of Eternal Life.

The Star of Bethlehem heralded the advent of Him Who said, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness." And so, the story of Christmas is the story of Eternal Light, which, being interpreted, means Eternal Life.

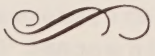
Life does not begin with physical but rather with spiritual birth. The Master Himself told us "Ye must be born again" and "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." He who is born of the flesh, dwells in darkness and it is only through rebirth out of the flesh into the Spirit, that man comes into the glorious effulgence of "The Light that lighteth the world"—the Living Christ.

The darkness in which man walks is his own shadow, caused by his turning his back on the Light. Man's only hope and the only hope of the world is, therefore, for man to turn about, face and walk in the Light—casting his shadow behind him.

Rebirth comes through renunciation—renunciation IS rebirth. Man can never know the meaning of life until, through rebirth, he becomes one with life.

God grant that, at this Christmastide, the Christ Child may be born in the hearts of many, for it is only through Christ that man can be redeemed and it is only in so far as the individual is redeemed that the world is redeemed.

— Harry Halsey Starrett



CHRISTMAS....THE HUMANIZING OF THE SUPREME

One of the greatest Christian mystics, Meister Eckhart, told his students that everything they said about God was untrue, that they could not comprehend him, that only a few in this life would ever come to know even a little of his real nature. A moment's reflection compels us to admit that this is, alas, all too true. The immense mystery of God, his unfathomable nature, his infinite being, his inscrutable will, must make us all humble and awed and convinced, deep in our hearts, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. That is why those who tell us confidently of his intentions for mankind commit an act of great presumption and something akin to blasphemy. No one knows what his intentions are. Let us admit it. No one knows anything of his nature, all that we say about him is untrue.

The great god-men and prophets of history stand as intermediaries between us and the unknown God, pointing the way for all of us to go. These were the men who had actually seen God. Jesus Christ was such a way-shower, or link between the human and the divine. Just as at a certain stage of evolution in the sub-human world it is difficult to say whether a particular form of life is vegetable or mineral, so it is difficult to say whether these men were divine or human. In any case they stand there in all their indestructible glory and compassion, reminding us eternally of our own natures and our destinies. That we could attain God and reach the perfection inherent in our souls without these luminaries is very doubtful, for why has there been a cosmic need of their presence on the earth in the first place, why did they have to appear at all if we could have achieved our goal without them?

Thus it is sublimely right that we pay homage at Christmas to the birth of Jesus, one of the supreme lamps of humanity. For the birth of a divine incarnation is, except for the idea of God itself, the most stupendous conception our minds can entertain.

The birth of Christ has many meanings, but one is that it represents the humanizing of the supreme and infinite Lord of the universe, whatever he may be in himself. Christ makes it easy and joyous to accept the idea of God. Without

him and the other world saviours it would be difficult to imagine where we would be. Our religion, if we had any, would be little better than idol-worship or a vague pantheism. With Christ, God seems to come close to us, he seems to be attainable, he seems to be concerned about us. Without him, we would never know for certain whether God was concerned or not. Christ, the embodiment of innocence and love, makes us feel that God must be love itself.

That such a shining figure as Jesus could have appeared makes it, in fact, not only easy to accept God but necessary to do so—for what power except the power of the Divine could have produced such a man? No wonder that those who saw him in the flesh said he was not human but divine, and worshipped him as God. We should do the same. We should cling to him as the focus of all our devotions, as the model for all our aspirations, and as the manifestation of what each of us in reality is.

Some people think of God as Omnipresence, or Mind, or Truth. These concepts developed in the metaphysical movement have an undoubted validity and fascination, but one questions whether they will prove altogether adequate, except for a few iron-willed souls, in our struggle to overcome egoism and grow to the perfection that constantly beckons to us at the edges of our consciousness. When we become really pure and spiritual we will be able to worship the Supreme Being directly, as spirit to Spirit. But as we are now, we are still very much *embodied* spirits and so it is better to turn our worship to someone who knew himself what it was to be a man, who also knew temptation, fear, doubt and all the emotions that drag at us every day of our lives. The philosophy of God conceived as Omnipresence or Mind will stimulate and excite us to spiritual endeavor but in the hour of temptation, in the moment of danger—will it save us?

Further, as grand and lofty as these concepts of God are, they fall short of the actual and realized greatness that living men have attained to, and Jesus was one of these. In his purity, love, power and compassion he represents an idea of God far greater than any metaphysical concept of Him. The whole world knows this and our joyful worship of the Nativity is, among other things, an instinctive and triumphant expression of this knowledge. »»»»

MAN'S BASIC NEEDS

By Robert J. McCracken, D.D.

In one of his letters, the letter to the Philippians, Paul advances a striking claim. "My God," he writes, "shall supply all your needs." It is not a claim to be treated lightly. Human need is as vast as it is varied. There came to my desk some time ago a book written by a well-known psychologist. It deals at length with our needs: our biological needs—hunger, thirst, rest, recuperation; our psychological needs—the craving for affection, for acceptance, for status; our sociological needs—the obligation we are all under to adjust to society, to find and make a place for ourselves among our fellows. There, however, the book stops. It has nothing to say about the most basic need of all—the hunger for God, a universal hunger, in evidence in every country and in every century and the driving power behind the religious impulse wherever it manifests itself.

The omission is characteristic. It is what one has come to expect in an age steadily growing more and more secularistic. We concentrate on our biological and psychological wants. Possessed of a physical nature with clamorous appetities, the temptation is to make a life of material comfort and enjoyment the chief end of existence. We are living only in the margins of our nature. We are not putting first things first. We are gratifying our lower impulses and starving or stifling our higher ones. Eat, drink and be as merry as you can, is the prevailing creed. God is forgotten. The spiritual dimension of existence is forgotten.

We all require the solemn warning that Christ gives us when He tells us bluntly that many people lose their lives and their souls because they place the emphasis on the wrong things, or on things necessary enough in themselves but not primary and certainly not supreme. They have no instinct for what is vital. Either they are not aware of their basic needs or they are crushing them. Great numbers of men and women come to the end of life disappointed and disillusioned. They have not put first things first. Some set their hearts on success, comfort, pleasure, and when they are achieved are bewildered to find that happiness has nevertheless eluded them. Some think the vital thing in life is money and use every

means to get it. Then, when they get it, they discover that money by itself does not satisfy. They have grasped the shadow and missed the substance. In instance after instance the trouble is the same—failure to distinguish between what is primary and what is secondary, between what is essential and what is incidental, between needs that are basic and needs that are marginal.

So I want to discuss some of our basic needs, elemental hungers set deep in our nature, strong in every one of us, hungers which we can ignore, suppress or thwart, but only and always at the cost of health and happiness.

For example, there is *the need for home*. No one will deny that this is one of the main hungers of the human heart—to live among familiar scenes, to be surrounded by familiar faces. Home is not so much a place as an atmosphere, a congenial, relaxing, kindly atmosphere, and to the human affections, atmosphere can mean everything. "There's no place like home," we say. There is magic in the word. It is one of the loveliest in the language. It is the focus of our experience. Around it cluster our fondest hopes and our strongest loyalties. It may be a tiny cottage, it may be a magnificent mansion—what matter so long as it is home, the place where understanding and love are sure to be found... When men fight, it is first and foremost not for the Four Freedoms, not for their way of life, not for liberty or conscience or democracy, but for their homes. Deprive an individual of his home and you denature him. Deprive a child of a home, of the security and affection it provides, and you expose him to influences that may bring about his undoing... Nothing in our generation is more tragic than the multitudes who are displaced persons, uprooted from hearth and home, deprived of the most powerful agency in the world for the making of the character of men and nations...

I go on to name another of man's needs, one of a quite different kind, *the need for justice*. Justice has been called the bread of humanity. For it people are always hungry. Every human being has a sense of right and wrong. It is a native sense, a realization, however vague and unreflective of a true order of things, of something that *ought* to be, that *must not* be violated. No individual lives, no matter what his race, creed or stage of culture, but has felt the need for justice.

Men cry out for justice as the hungry crave bread... It is an old belief that hereafter, if not here, the balance between right and wrong will be adjusted, that soon or late, somewhere, the right will be vindicated and the wrong punished, that the soul of the universe, like its Maker, is just and bent on the establishment of justice...

Men will put up with intolerable situations for an incredibly long time, but always what heaves the quietest, meekest people into revolution and bloodshed is a haunting sense of injustice. All the bloody wars of the world have arisen from some smouldering feeling of injustice. The feeling may be mistaken or exaggerated, but so long as it exists in men's hearts it will move them to unpredictable heroisms and sacrifice. This is not a need to suppress or stifle. Let your soul always respond to the cry for justice. Be ashamed of yourself if you have lost the hunger for what is right, if you ease your conscience by telling yourself that things are not as bad as they seem, or that there is nothing you can do about them, or that they are not your business anyway. You should be alert and sensitive to whatever is unfair or unjust.

I come now to the basic need, *the need for God.* Of all our hungers this is the deepest. Have you ever pondered the significance of the universality of religion? Anthropologists are unable to find a nation or a tribe without religion. There is no nation or tribe without religion now. From the dawn of history men have been seeking after God. The biblical writer must have been thinking of this when he wrote, "God has made everything beautiful in its season; also He has set eternity in men's hearts." Religion is instinctive in human nature. It is like the homing instinct in the bird. Its foundations lie deep in the souls of men. Nameless longings stir in him. He is driven by a ceaseless urge to understand the mysterious world in which he is placed, and the even more mysterious soul which he has and is. He is so made that the impulse to worship is inherent and ineradicable. He must have something to believe in, to belong to, to give himself to with heart and soul and mind.

It must be admitted that thousands live without seeming to bother much about God. Yet deep down in them there is this hunger for the Infinite, this aspiration after something bigger and finer

than any eat, drink and be merry philosophy provides. It betrays itself in vague yearning and restless striving, in an ever-renewed attempt to lay hold on durable satisfactions, to appease an inner craving which is with us at the beginning of conscious life and lasts as long as life itself. To find and know God is the chief end of existence. Until it is realized the deepest happiness will always elude us. Whether we are aware of it or not we are all seeking God, for we all need Him. Even when we are yielding to sin we are looking for something that will appease the hunger of our soul. Religions as such may die, but religion itself never; for there is in the human heart this insatiable yearning for God.

I appeal to your own experience. Is it not the case that below the surface contentment with the world and the things of the world you are sometimes aware of a sense of unsatisfied need. A touch is enough to waken it. Something in the evening sky, a strain of music, a line in a book, a sorrow in your heart, the eyes of a child, close contact with death, the challenge of Christ, stir in you a longing, make you conscious of a painful emptiness in your heart and of the inadequacy of material things to afford true satisfaction.

We need God if we are to be saved from moral futility and acquire power to win character. We need Him if our lives are to be rich and full and satisfying. A soul without God is sooner or later an empty, aching, homesick soul. Though we may not recognize it, our whole being cries out for the living God. He is to our spirit what oxygen is to the lungs. Fellowship with Him gives us what is every bit as necessary as oxygen. "I had fainted unless I had believed," a Psalmist tells us. Many of us faint and do not know the reason. It is because we have not realized our deepest need—our need of God. Religion is not an extra. It is the fundamental necessity of our existence. It gives foundation to our world. It opens in our lives a perennial spring that nothing can dry up. As to that, no saying has struck deeper than that of Augustine, and he was speaking out of his own experience: "Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee."

(The above is an abridgment of a talk delivered on the SUNDAY RADIO CHAPEL of Station WOR under the auspices of the Protestant Council of New York.)

SLAYING THE COBRA

By Rev. Roy Wallace Thomas

One morning a Hindu lad was walking through his father's garden in India. The rich beauty and fresh perfume of the flowers filled him with quiet joy. It was fortunate that he moved slowly for, coiled in the path, a king cobra raised its head ready to strike. This sight gave the boy the greatest shock he had known, but in spite of it he kept his presence of mind. He pulled up a stake supporting a vine and before the snake could spread its hood to full size, he broke its neck. As the uncoiled body rose and fell and lashed, attempting to wind about the lad, he struck the head until the snake grew still. It was a brave thing for a boy to do.

He afterward asked his mother many questions. Why are there venomous serpents in the world hiding in the midst of beauty? Why was his own heart like that garden, with viperlike thoughts among the good thoughts, ready to strike at the good in him and cause him to do unlovely things? And why were there about him in the world men worse than snakes, because of the greater harm they did, increasing the miseries of the poor, betraying the innocent, abusing the weak, men dominated by passion and greed? The mother could not answer these questions.

But she was able to show her son that just as he had power to keep his presence of mind in the face of danger and slay the cobra, so also there was power in him to crush the snake of evil impulse whenever it raised its head to corrupt his mind and destroy the good. And she taught him how to keep calm in the presence of evil, how to awaken his energies, and how to secure additional power sufficient to make conquest certain.

Since this Hindu mother was a devout woman, she explained that the power in him which could be incited to the conquest of evil was the presence of God, arising from His own image implanted deeply in the heart and will; and that there was no better way to guard the heart and strengthen the will than to follow the practice of godly men. This, too, was a brave thing for a boy to do, she pointed out, for it would force him many times to stand alone when the crowd, bent on evil, was laughing his integrity to scorn. At other times it would

force him to join unpopular groups and movements, even to suffer hardship and persecution in his efforts to do good effectively, and to be always on the side of right and humanity. She made clear that it was braver for him to stand alone for right than weakly to join the crowd in doing wrong.

The serpent entered very early into religious literature as the personification of evil in the soul of man. We know the reason for it. Sin is adder-like and terrible. It murders the finest impulses in human nature. It releases treachery and cold savagery.

There is the cobra of greed. One day I met a friend who had been a paragon of health and well-being. Now he was a trembling invalid. "What is the matter?" I asked. He explained that he and his wife had retired with just enough savings to keep them comfortably, but with promise of great financial profit they had listened to a glib, snake-like salesman who had persuaded them to invest all their savings in his enterprise. They soon discovered that the stocks were worthless, their money was gone and old age was at hand.

There is the cobra of alcohol, the greatest cause of accidents on our crowded highways. There is the cobra of lust, that poisons the minds of tender youth, catching its victims unaware, then slinks off irresponsibly to let them and their families suffer untold agony.

There is the cobra of hate. A cultured Negro family suffered a motor accident on a midwest highway. Broken glass cut an artery in the arm of the driver. His wife held the severed ends together with her fingers and frantically signaled for help with the other hand. The Sunday afternoon procession of automobiles sped by. It was two hours later when a humane driver stopped and saved her husband.

There is the multi-headed cobra of war that causes a Stalin, Mussolini or Hitler to desolate millions upon millions of hapless human beings, as war has done in every century of history.

We are told that the story of the Garden of Eden, as we find it in Genesis, was a revision of an earlier legend current in ancient Palestine. Despite the venomous power of evil, the Genesis story could not conclude without a note of hope. It caused God to say to the serpent, if I may tell it in my own words: "Evil shall not eternally prevail, for I will put enmity between you and man, and though at a

cost, man will crush you."

In this world which Genesis called good, created by a God whom Jesus called good, it is unthinkable that the last word in human history will be one of despair and pessimism. God, by the power of that goodness which is stronger than evil, will triumph through the ultimate cooperation of mankind, since the major truth in human evolution is the rise of the power of divine light and strength in man. The God of Jesus contains all the qualities that will win in the end, and the power adequate to heal all the hurts of man incurred in his painful struggle and rise.

The truly wise among men are not prophets of doom. They are in harmony with the seventeenth-century Henry Vaughan who, on an ordinary day, sang in his poem "The World":

" I saw Eternity the other night,
Like a great ring of pure and
endless light,
All calm as it was bright."

Is not that what we all see every Christmas eve, when we look deeply and try to picture what the Wise Men saw in the Manger—a gleam of eternal light shining from a Baby's face? Does not this light radiate from the available Power that can give the individual and also the race of mankind victory over all evil? Well may our candles glow and our youth send forth their carols on the midnight air!

CHRISTMAS....MORE THAN A HOLIDAY

People must realize that Christmas is *Christ*. The joy of Christmas is a joy that even wars and their aftermath cannot fill, for it is the joy of souls, and the soul can never die. The poverty and sorrows and hardship caused by wars throughout the world cannot prevent the joy of Christmas, for it is a joy no earthly wealth can give to mankind.

Christmas belongs to eternity. Time cannot wither it. The material world cannot shatter the joy of Christmas, for it is union with Him who has overcome the world.

— Ada Mae Hoffrek

THE LEGEND OF THE FOURTH WISE MAN

Henry Van Dyke's account of the Fourth Wise Man, named Artaban, deserves to be retold at this season.

Artaban was on his way to Bethlehem carrying a sapphire, a ruby and a pearl of great price, when he saw a man lying unconscious by the side of the road. The time it took to revive the half-dead man made it impossible for him to meet up with the three other Wise Men. To expedite his journey he sold the sapphire to buy a camel that took him across the desert to Palestine. In Bethlehem a woman with a baby informed him that the other wise men had been there but that the Child and his parents had already left for Egypt. Shortly afterwards Herod's soldiers pounded at her door in their search for infant boys they had been ordered to slay. Artaban bargained with them and by giving away his ruby was able to save the life of the woman's boy.

From Bethlehem he goes to Egypt, still searching for the Child, always a short time behind Him and his parents, and always finding someone in need of help. This continues for thirty-three years until he appears at Jerusalem, an old man now, still carrying his last gift, the pearl of great price. Rumors reach him that a man called the "King of the Jews" is about to be crucified and suddenly Artaban realizes that this is the One he has been seeking so long. In the hope that his precious pearl may ransom this King he starts for Golgotha. On the way he encounters a young girl being carried off into slavery. After a moment of indecision, Artaban gives away the pearl for her freedom.

Just then an earthquake shatters the countryside. Artaban is thrown to the ground. As he lies there, his life ebbing away, he hears a voice whispering to him, though he can see no one, and after a time he murmurs an answer: "When did I do any of these things, Lord? Feed Thee? Save Thee? For thirty-three years I have looked for Thee, but I have never found Thee." And the voice replies: "Inasmuch as thou hast done it unto one of the least of my brethren, thou hast done it unto Me."

As Artaban's eyes close for the last time, an expression of peace and joy rests on his face. The Fourth Wise Man has brought his gift to the King.

A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

By W. J. Thompson, D.D.

"And when they came into the house they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him; and they presented unto Him gifts—gold, and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned of God that they should not return to Herod, they returned to their own country by another way."

Bethlehem is the birthplace of the sweetest story ever told. There is nothing in literature to be compared with the stories of Matthew and Luke concerning the birth of Jesus Christ. They have wrought their spell on literature, music, art and life. The anniversary of the birth of our Lord has never grown commonplace. It is celebrated throughout the world and even those who do not personally acknowledge Him as Saviour are strangely influenced at Christmas time.

The message of Christmas is that God has taken the initiative. He who made us and the world has come to His own with the Living Word of Life, so that we need nevermore despair, or lose our way.

The Old Testament opens with the picture of a man in a garden. The New Testament opens with the picture of a child in a manger.

Around the figure of the man, Genesis weaves the story of "Paradise Lost." Around the figure of the child the Gospels weave the story of "Paradise Regained!"

The creation story in Genesis 1:27 tells of man made in the image of God. The Christmas Story in Luke 2:11-12, tells of God made in the image of man. The story of the Wise Men who came seeking Jesus is found in Matthew 2:1-12.

The Scripture informs us: "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem...behold, there came wise men from the East...saying, where is he that is born King of the Jews, for we have seen His star in the East, and come to worship Him." Later we read of the successful outcome of this journey—"And when they came into the house they saw the young child and His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him." There is a story of struggle and search and success in these seven words— "And when they came into the house."

These Wise Men from the East had crossed the desert, forded rivers, groped through darkness, overcome difficulty and danger, and finally ar-

rived at their destination. It is all concentrated in these few words, "And when they came into the house..."

We may well ask, "What was the secret of their success?" Here is the answer: They followed a star! And when any man or woman follows a great purpose persistently through darkness and difficulty, and danger, there is more than strength of will in that achievement—there is a star somewhere.

The Wise Men succeeded because they followed a star.

It is important to note that while the Wise Men followed a star, that star was not their goal, but their guide. They followed the star in order to find the Babe of Bethlehem.

There are those who confuse the means with the end. They not only follow the star—they also worship it. They fail to distinguish between the star and the Saviour, and confuse the constellation with the Christ.

Never permit any radiance to rob you of your Redeemer! Scholarship, Music, Art, Literature, Beauty of Nature, Social Fellowship—all these are good, and if followed rightly, will lead you unto the presence of the Lord. But it is a tragic mistake to worship the star instead of the Saviour.

"And when they came into the house they saw the young child and worshipped Him."

There were some who looked at the child and saw nothing worthy of a second glance. But when the Wise Men came into the place they saw the child and worshipped him. Why this difference between two groups of people?

The answer is—the Wise Men were seeking Him, and what we see depends more than we think upon what we seek. You will note that when the Wise Men found Christ they discovered more than they expected.

"They saw the young child with Mary his mother." And whenever we find the Lord and worship Him, we find also Motherhood, Fatherhood, Brotherhood and all the relationships of Life bright with the Light of Heaven!

In conclusion observe the suggestive order of these words: "they worshipped Him and presented unto Him Gifts."

First worship, then gifts. It is a great mistake to worship without offering Him gifts. And it is a grave error to present gifts to Him without sincere worship. The two should go together in the order named: "They worshipped Him, and presented unto Him gifts." «««»

JESUS: HIS RELIGION AND CHARACTER

By Ernest Renan

(The following pages are an abridgment of significant passages in Ernest Renan's famous LIFE OF JESUS, published in 1863. Renan's LIFE shocked his contemporaries because it was the first study to treat Jesus as a man, as a historical figure, rather than an incarnation of God. We do not subscribe to all of Renan's implications, but we present him to our readers for the enchantment of his style and the illumination of his insights. Moreover, he affords a classic example of a man who belonged to no religious group and was called an atheist by his critics but who, as much as anyone, was captivated and awed by the greatness of Jesus.)

In order to be a disciple of Jesus it was not necessary to sign any formulary, or to pronounce any confession of faith; one thing only was necessary—to be attached to him, to love him. He never disputed about God, for he felt Him directly in himself. Jesus had neither dogma nor system, but a fixed personal resolution, which, exceeding in intensity every other created will, directs to this hour the destinies of humanity...

Love is not enkindled except by an object worthy of it, and we should know nothing of Jesus if it were not for the passion he inspired in those about him, which compels us still to affirm that he was great and pure. The faith, the enthusiasm, the constancy of the first Christian generation is not explicable, except by supposing at the origin of the whole movement a man of surpassing greatness...

He did not argue with his disciples; he demanded from them no effort of attention. He did not preach his opinions; he preached himself. Very great and very disinterested minds often present, associated with much elevation, that character of perpetual attention to themselves, and extreme personal susceptibility, which, in general, is peculiar to women. Their conviction that God is in them, and occupies Himself perpetually with them, is so strong, that they have no fear of obtruding themselves upon others. This exaltation of self is not egotism; for such men, possessed by their idea, give their lives freely, in order to seal their work; it is the identification of self with the object it has embraced, carried to its utmost limit. It is regarded as vainglory by those who see in the new teaching only the personal phan-

tasy of the founder; but it is the finger of God to those who see the result...

Jesus did not speak against the Mosaic law, but it is clear that he saw its insufficiency, and allowed it to be seen that he did so. He repeated unceasingly that more must be done than the ancient sages had commanded. He forbade the least harsh word; he prohibited divorce and all swearing; he censured revenge; he condemned usury; he considered voluptuous desire as criminal as adultery; he insisted upon a universal forgiveness of injuries...

A pure worship, a religion without priests and external observances, resting entirely on the feelings of the heart, on the imitation of God, on the direct relation of the conscience with the heavenly Father, was the result of these principles. Jesus never shrank from this bold conclusion, which made him a thorough revolutionist in the very centre of Judaism. Why should there be mediators between man and his Father? As God only sees the heart, of what good are these purifications, these observances relating to the body?...

He did not affect any external signs of asceticism, contenting himself with praying, or rather meditating, upon the mountains, and in the solitary places, where man has always sought God. He insisted particularly upon the idea that the heavenly Father knows better than we what we need, and that we almost sin against Him in asking Him for this or that particular thing...

Jesus in this only carried out the consequences of the great principles which Judaism had established, but which the official classes of the nation tended more and more to despise. Jesus alone, however, proclaimed these principles in an effective manner. Never has any one been less a priest than Jesus, never a greater enemy of forms which stifle religion under the pretext of protecting it. By this we are all his disciples and his successors; by this he has laid the eternal foundation-stone of true religion; and if religion is essential to humanity, he has by this deserved the Divine rank the world has accorded to him...

In morals, as in art, precept is nothing, practice is everything. The idea which is hidden in a picture of Raphael is of little moment: it is the picture itself which is prized. So, too, in morals, truth is but little prized when it is a mere sentiment, and only attains its full value when re-

alized in the world as fact. The palm is his who has been mighty both in words and in works, who has discerned the good, and at the price of his blood has caused its triumph. Jesus, from this double point of view, is without equal; his glory remains entire, and will ever be renewed...

During his last days, the enormous weight of the mission he had accepted pressed cruelly upon Jesus. Human nature asserted itself for a time. Perhaps he began to hesitate about his work. Terror and doubt took possession of him, and threw him into a state of exhaustion worse than death. He who has sacrificed his repose, and the legitimate rewards of life, to a great idea, always experiences a feeling of revulsion when the image of death presents itself to him for the first time, and seeks to persuade him that all has been in vain. Perhaps some of those touching reminiscences which the strongest souls preserve, and which at times pierce like a sword, came upon him at this moment. Did he remember the clear fountains of Galilee where he was wont to refresh himself; the vine and the figtree under which he had reposed? Did he curse the hard destiny which had denied him the joys conceded to all others? Did he regret his too lofty nature and, victim of his greatness, did he mourn that he had not remained a simple artisan of Nazareth? We know not. It is certain, at least, that his divine nature soon regained the supremacy. He might still have avoided death; but he would not. Love for his work sustained him. He was willing to drink the cup to the dregs...

Apart from this small group of women, whose presence consoled him, Jesus had before him only the spectacle of the baseness or stupidity of humanity. The passers-by insulted him. He heard around him foolish scoffs, and his greatest cries of pain turned into hateful jests. It appears that the two crucified thieves at his side also insulted him. The sky was dark; and the earth, as in all the environs of Jerusalem, dry and gloomy. For a moment, according to certain narratives, his heart failed him; a cloud hid from him the face of his Father; he endured an agony of despair a thousand times more acute than all his torture. He saw only the ingratitude of men; he perhaps repented suffering for a vile race, and exclaimed: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But his divine instinct still prevailed. In the degree that the life of the body became extinguished, his

soul became clear, and returned by degrees to its celestial origin. He regained the idea of his mission; he saw in his death the salvation of the world; he lost sight of the hideous spectacle spread at his feet, and, profoundly united to his Father, he began upon the gibbet the divine life which he was to live in the heart of humanity through infinite ages...

This sublime person, who each day still presides over the destiny of the world, we may call divine, not in the sense that Jesus has absorbed all the divine... but in the sense that Jesus is the one who has caused his fellow-men to make the greatest step toward the divine. Mankind in its totality offers an assemblage of low beings, selfish, and superior to the animal only in that its selfishness is more reflective. From the midst of this uniform mediocrity, there are pillars that rise toward the sky, and bear witness to a nobler destiny. Jesus is the highest of these pillars which show to man whence he comes, and whither he ought to tend. In him was condensed all that is good and elevated in our nature. He was not sinless; he has conquered the same passions that we combat. In the same way that many of his great qualities are lost to us, through the fault of his disciples, it is also probable that many of his faults have been concealed. But never has any one so much as he made the interests of humanity predominate in his life over the littlenesses of self-love. Unreservedly devoted to his mission, he subordinated everything to it to such a degree that, toward the end of his life, the universe no longer existed for him. It was by this access of heroic will that he conquered heaven. There never was a man, Gautama Buddha perhaps excepted, who has to this degree trampled under foot, family, the joys of this world, and all temporal care. Jesus only lived for his Father and the divine mission which he believed himself destined to fulfill...

Will great originality be born again, or will the world content itself henceforth by following the ways opened by the bold creators of the ancient ages? We know not. But whatever may be the unexpected phenomena of the future, Jesus will not be surpassed. His worship will constantly renew its youth, the tale of his life will cause ceaseless tears, his sufferings will soften the best hearts; all the ages will proclaim that, among the sons of men, there is none born who is greater than Jesus. «««»»

CREEDS AS SYMBOLS

By Harold K. Schilling

For many people creeds are serious obstacles to the acceptance of church membership. They feel they cannot honestly subscribe to the ideas embodied in the creeds—which admittedly ancient ideas they regard as fossilized, outmoded and untenable. An example is the Apostle's creed that is recited periodically in many churches:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only begotten son our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary: Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried: He descended into hell; The third day he rose again from the dead: He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty: From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead: I believe in the Holy Ghost: The Holy Catholic Church; the Communion of Saints: The Forgiveness of Sins: The resurrection of the body: And the Life Everlasting. Amen.

There are, of course, many other creedal formulations, but I shall confine my remarks to the Apostle's creed, which is probably the one cherished most widely. It is obvious that it includes phrases that we no longer use in everyday life, and therefore seem meaningless. Consider the following: "the only begotten Son," "conceived by the Holy Ghost (or Spirit)," "born of the virgin Mary," "ascended into heaven," "sitteth at the right hand of God," and others. They do seem rather nonsensical at first sight, and yet for many of us they represent profound and revealing insights that are relevant to our most basic concerns, and affect our lives and thoughts at their deepest levels. Clearly this is a paradoxical situation. How can this be?

By way of a partial answer I should like to present three propositions: First, primarily the Apostle's creed expresses a *faith*. Second, only secondarily does it express *doctrine* or *belief*. Third, it is a *symbol* of faith—and its language is *symbolic*. Let me repeat them. First, *faith;* second, *doctrine;* third, *symbol*.

Christianity itself is a faith, and not a cult or a particular system of beliefs. It is not primarily a way of thinking or reasoning about

God, but a way of personally responding to Him, and having faith in Him. What too many people seem to have overlooked is the fact that the Apostle's creed begins with "I believe *in* God," not "I believe *that there is a* God." Faith in the Bible, we are told by Biblical scholars, always means *believing in* God, trusting Him, and entrusting oneself to Him. It never means an assenting to theological propositions or doctrines.

That this distinction is exceedingly important is evident in everyday life. To say "I believe in my country, or my friends, or my wife" is to say something very different from "I believe that my country, my friends, and my wife exist." The latter seems rather pointless, and one is tempted to ask: Why mention it? The former, however, is rich with significance. It expresses devotion to one's country, friends and family, a willingness to trust them, a desire to be identified with them, a hope that they also believe in us.

This, I suggest, is the spirit and intent of the Apostle's creed. It is above all a confession of such a *faith* in God, in the sense of believing in Him. If this be granted, my next point is that a creed is a *symbol* of that faith. I confess that it was only recently that I learned that technically the creeds are called *the symbols of the Church*. They are symbols, just as the cross, the crucifix and the Lord's supper are symbols. Moreover their language is symbolic. Therefore, if we would really understand the Apostle's creed, we must keep in mind that its imagery is symbolic.

When we wish to communicate adequately about matters of personal faith, of deep and complete involvement, about that which is most precious and of ultimate concern to us, we must resort to the language of poetry, parable, myth and symbol rather than the discursive, expository prose of the sciences and philosophy. Why did Jesus use the parable so persistently as a vehicle for teaching? Doubtless because only thus could he teach truths of ultimate concern in all their dimensions and meanings. Suppose instead of telling the beautiful story of the prodigal son, he had given a lecture on prodigality in the idiom of philosophic ethics. Is it likely that this would have made any real impression on his hearers or that they would have remembered it very long? Consider also the story of the compassionate Samaritan. Jesus told it in response

to the question: Who is my neighbor? How much more it tells than could possibly have been told by a formal dissertation on the meaning of the term 'neighbor'.

Now, if it be granted that the language of the creed *is* symbolic and at least in part poetic, then it follows that it should be read poetically or symbolically.

"I believe in God *the Father.*" How wonderfully expressive is this obviously symbolic language. God, as Father, provider, one who cares! We are reminded of the prodigal son who, when he had spent everything he had, when he was down and out, alone without friends, and despised, said: "I will return to my father. He will still care." We are reminded also of the father, who, when he saw his son at a distance, recognized him at once, promptly gave orders to insure his proper reception, and then himself went to meet him on the road and welcome him hone. God is like that!

"I believe in God the Father and in Jesus Christ, His only *begotten* Son...*conceived* by the Holy Ghost (Spirit)..." Should we now become prosaic about "begotten" and "conceived?" No! In the realm of human life how rich with meaning are the words *begotten* and *conceived* for a man and woman who have the great fortune of being parents together. Yes, they do refer to biology and sex. But do they not also signify much more? Do they not mean an indescribable giving and receiving without reservations, a complete union of bodies *and* spirits, a way of self-fulfillment achievable only through love that creatively brings into being a new life, and another love? I say that *here, in the very heart of this creed that expresses the Christian faith, the words "Father," "begotten Son," "conceived of the Holy Spirit," symbolize the central message of the Bible, namely, that the almighty creative force in the universe and in human life is love—the love that is God and comes from God.*

When we pass to the phrase "born of the virgin Mary" should we not read this in the same way? Even though the birth of human life is always a miraculous event, has not history shown that this birth was something special? Somehow, in a way we shall never understand, with this birth the course of history changed. With it powerful spiritual forces were released into the world, which many, many men and women since then have ex-

perienced as truly redemptive and liberating. For the early Christians, no ordinary language would do in referring to this birth. The most powerfully suggestive language available at the time for speaking of so momentous an event was "born of a virgin." Only *it* could make this birth seem at all credible. Whether Mary was or was not a virgin physically seems not too important in the light of the reality of the remarkable act of God that the expressive image of the virgin birth symbolizes.

Let me acknowledge that many Christians have interpreted the virgin birth literally. Indeed, some denominations insist on it. The same is true of other phrases of the creed, such as "descended into hell," "ascended into heaven." It is altogether possible, even probable, that the early Christians, too, thought of them literally. The point I want to make, however, is that though the early Christians doubtless did think of the virgin birth, the resurrection, the descent of Christ into hell, and his ascension, as credible physical events, they most surely regarded them as symbolic in their meaning and significance. For them, as for many of us today, these events were symbolic of and pointed toward God's fatherly redemptive love, and the liberating experiences He had vouchsafed in the coming of Jesus Christ.

I wish it were possible to do more than merely touch on this subject. Just what, in detail, do such phrases as "ascended into heaven," "sitteth at the right hand of God the Father" mean? Can they mean anything vital to us today, with our radically different conceptions of the cosmos, the world, biological life, the nature of man, the realm of the spiritual?

There is still very much that puzzles me about the Apostle's creed, and others. But I can't help feeling that the key to a true understanding of it is the realization that the creed is first of all a symbol of faith, that it expresses belief *in* God as loving Father, and in His Son Jesus Christ through whom the love of God has been made manifest most clearly, and in the Holy Spirit, which, if we yield to it, continually rekindles and revitalizes that love in our hearts. It is this creative, redemptive love that we are asked to accept through faith, to confess in the creed, and to shed abroad in the world for our neighbors. It is all this—and much, much more—of which the Apostle's creed is a symbol. ««»»

WHO IS A SAINT?

By Swami Ritajananda

In some of the well-known religions of the world there is a great reverence shown to exceptionally great religious leaders. They are considered to have direct communion with God and they stand as the messengers of Him. Some are known only within the community in which they lived, while some are known far beyond their borders. It is also seen that it is not unusual to hear that they performed miracles while they were alive and even after their death. Considering the fact that all religions believe in one supra-cosmic Being and all believe that saints are the messengers of Him, we shall consider here the essential qualities that make a saint irrespective of particular religious backgrounds, since saints not only contribute something valuable to their own religion but also to humanity.

Whenever people saw in individuals extraordinary piety, highly ethical lives and self-sacrifice, they showed them respect. Their lives seem to belong to a different plane from which all worldly problems are removed. While the scriptures talk about God, and the meaning and purpose of religion, the saint is there to give a direct expression of it as if he is the scripture in flesh and blood. Although we can classify the saints under different heads, the great ones are those whose lives and teachings are universal in their appeal. At the present time, with our contacts with religions besides our own, we have come to see this point very clearly. We find that Milarepa of Tibet, St. Francis of Assisi and Ramakrishna of India have messages going beyond their own religion. If a saint is one who has given up his all for God, wherever an individual has done that he deserves the title of saint. This is his one and only important qualification.

Although for most of us the gathering of worldly goods is the ideal, yet we have been struck with admiration of those people who have given up all these and still have a joy which we are not able to get. Renunciation and service to the world seem to have been held in the greatest respect throughout history. All the great prophets practised these twin ideals in their own lives and the saints have supported them. The secret is that it gives the individual

an unsurpassed amount of freedom, courage and indefatigable energy. There is nothing in this world which will check their movements and they were ready to face death if necessary.

What is the source of this strength? Who has given these people such a conviction that there is nothing to fear? What is it that makes them love the whole world without any stinginess? It is God, the source of all life and love. Like a magnet He attracts all of us continually. Like the attraction between a magnet and an iron particle, the relationship between man and God is eternal. The iron piece gets the magnetism by its association with the magnet and the man by his close association with God gets the divine qualities. He knows that the Lord is his refuge and the only shelter. He sees it daily and constantly. With this awareness, his pattern of behavior has changed once for all. "The highest flights of charity, devotion, trust, patience, bravery to which the wings of human nature have spread themselves have been flown for religious ideals," says William James in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*. Whenever such characteristics were seen, people felt them as signs of holiness. The saints are all the embodiment of purity so that their very presence can alter the course of thinking of many people. This is a standing test of a saint, that when a person given to evil ways accidentally comes across a holy person, by that very association he takes a new approach to life.

Some saints have become great writers and recorded their spiritual experiences. Some did not even write any book but only spoke their words to those nearby, which have been recorded by the devout disciples. Those words which have the mark of divine inspiration travel round the world and are sometimes even translated in other languages. Whenever such literature fell into the hands of spiritually hungry souls, or those who strayed away from the proper life, or the non-believers, they have accomplished the greatest miracles of conversion. They have become the guiding angels for the sheep that had strayed away. They have brought faith to those who have lost faith. The words of all these illumined personalities have the qualities of simplicity and directness without any effort to convince the reader through flourishes of style. The genuineness of the spiritual truth is apparent to all who read those teach-

ings. The lives of many people have been completely transformed by them.

When we try to probe into the mystery behind the saint, who also is born as a human being, and how the divine attributes of ethical perfection became a part of their nature, we never succeed. The saints themselves have no explanation. They never felt that they could win the favor of the Lord by their austerities and prayers, but the Lord out of his infinite mercy chose them, why they know not. Some were drawn from their very birth and some after many trials and sometimes even from the depths of worldliness. This overpowering experience burns once for all the subject-consciousness and makes them the eternal servant of the Lord. Although to the external world he is the doer or the agent, these children of God see clearly it is the divine power that is working and not themselves. Many have said that they were only the instruments of God and as St. Augustine expressed it, we are all created for God Himself and not for ourselves. This is the secret of their power, coming from the source of all Light and Life.

Having thus discovered his place and purpose in this world, the saint attains a stability not ordinarily seen. Having united himself with the divine, there is nothing else which can give him joy. "Him alone we can call a saint who sees the manifestation of the Lord in all beings, who has driven away from his heart anger and passion, who has found peace and forgiveness in his mind. Just as trees do not make any difference between those who honor or dishonor them, the saints in their supreme courage look upon honor and dishonor alike. They are people who have unshakeable faith in the Lord's name and have eradicated all personal worldly desires...," says a Hindu saint, Namadev.

When centuries roll on we discover that the call of the Divine has been answered by people of different races and religions who have brought the message of the Highest Good. They have left their marks in the best manner by their teachings and character, which even today are leading humanity to a perfected life.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given... and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

—*Isaiah 9:6*

'ALL WILL BE WELL...'

After this the Lord brought to my mind the longing that I had to Him afore. And I saw that nothing hindered me but sin. And so I thought: If sin had not been, we should all have been clean and like to our Lord, as He made us.

And thus in my folly... I wondered why by the great foreseeing wisdom of God the beginning of sin was not prevented; for then methought all should have been well... But Jesus, Who in this vision informed me of all that is needful to me, answered by this word and said: Sin is necessary; but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.. But I believe sin hath no manner of substance nor no part of being, nor could it be known but by the pain it is cause of.

And this pain...purgeth and maketh us to know ourselves and to ask mercy. For the passion of our Lord is comfort to us against all this, and so is His blessed will. And for the tender love that our good Lord hath to all that shall be saved, He comforteth sweetly and readily, signifying thus: It is true that sin is cause of all this pain; but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.

These words were said full tenderly, showing no manner of blame to me nor to any that shall be saved. Then were it a great unkindness to blame or wonder on God for my sin, since He blameth not me for sin. And in these words I saw a marvelous high mystery hid in God, which mystery He shall openly make known to us in heaven: In which knowing we shall verily see the cause why He suffered sin to come. In which sight we shall endlessly joy in our Lord God...

This is a sovereign friendship of our courteous Lord, that He keepth us so tenderly while we be in sin; and furthermore He teacheth us full privily and showeth us our sin by the sweet light of mercy and grace... And then showeth our courteous Lord himself to the soul, well merrily and with glad cheer, with friendly welcoming as if it had been in pain and in prison, saying sweetly thus: My darling, I am glad thou art come to me; in all thy woe I have ever been with thee; and now seest thou my loving, and we be oned in bliss... Thus are sins forgiven... and our soul is worshipfully received in joy like as it shall be when it cometh to heaven...

— *Julian of Norwich (1342-1442)*

Book Review

THE ART OF SPIRITUAL HEALING, By Joel S. Goldsmith; Harper & Bros., New York, N. Y., 1959, 190 pp; $3.00

Joel S. Goldsmith is well known in metaphysical literature as the author of THE INFINITE WAY and THE ART OF MEDITATION. One finds his name regularly appearing in book lists in the company of reputable spiritual teachers. Consequently we received with interest his latest book, just published, THE ART OF SPIRITUAL HEALING, which is a representative work reflecting the outlook and philosophy of most of the metaphysical schools of religion.

The most impressive thing about the book is the great sincerity, the intensity and directness with which it is written, in contrast to the vague, poetic style that characterizes much of the writing of the school to which the author belongs. We recommend it to all who have been helped by the metaphysical teaching, and to those not familiar with this teaching it should stand as an effective introduction.

Our reservations do not concern the book so much as the philosophy underlying it...

The deepest hunger in man's soul is the urge to adore and worship. For much of our lives this need is directed to some extraordinary human figure, but its ultimate significance is in our need to worship God himself. It is frankly questionable whether this insatiable need can ever be satisfied by the fundamental approach of the metaphysical movement, in which one is taught to dwell on profound truths—such as that we are actually one with Divine Love every moment of our lives—merely on the basis of intellectual apprehension, and before we have had direct experience, of any kind, of the reality of those truths.

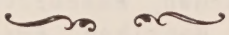
Moreover, it would appear extremely difficult to achieve the all-important prize of self-surrender to the Lord by following solely the methods practiced and taught in the metaphysical schools.

These and similar reservations noted in this month's editorial are points that the followers of the metaphysical teaching might consider. We submit them in a spirit of camaraderie and good-will that recognizes the tremendous good the metaphysical movement has already accomplished, and the important implications for the future of religion discernible in its emergence and growth during the last seventy-five years.

NOTICES and COMMENTS

CONTRIBUTORS. We extend a hearty welcome to Dr. Harold K. Schilling, dean of Pennsylvania State College, on his return to FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER. He is ably represented in this issue with 'Creeds as Symbols', a worthy successor to his 'That Strange Word, Holy' that appeared in our February issue... Welcome is also due Miss Ada Mae Hoffrek for her forceful reminder of 'Christmas...More Than a Holiday'. Miss Hoffrek will be with us again with a special spring article in the April number next year... Absent from our pages for a long time, but widely known in religious circles, is the esteemed minister of New York's Riverside Church, Dr. Robert J. McCracken, and we trust that he will inspire us in the near future with another article of the calibre of 'Man's Basic Needs'. Dr. McCracken gave us the fullest cooperation in the matter of editing and printing this article, which was originally delivered as a radio talk in New York City... The cover lines from a statement by President Eisenhower were generously supplied to us by Dr. W. J. Thompson... Once again it is our privilege to express our deepest thanks to Dr. Thompson, Rev. Thomas, Swami Ritajananda, A. E. Johnson, Harry Halsey Starrett and to all who have helped us faithfully and ably during the past year. New writers are the lifeblood of any magazine and ours is no exception, but it is a tremendous gratification to be able to depend on the abilities and cooperation of our regular writers from issue to issue. We are sure that all our readers will concur in our heartfelt appreciation of their contributions, particularly at this season of the year. Without their support there is no doubt that FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER would be something much less than it is today.

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS. May the grace of the Lord Jesus abide in every one of us, strengthen us to greater efforts in service and prayer through the coming year, and cause us to dwell in all humility and love on the meaning of his birth and the events of his immortal life. May we pray to God for gratitude that he came to us at all... May we also bow our heads in reverence to the memory of all the prophets, East and West, who have guided struggling humanity in the past ages and, we may be sure, will still appear to guide those who come after us.



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None of us liveth to himself,
and no man dieth to himself.
For whether we live,
we live unto the Lord;
And whether we die,
we die unto the Lord:
Whether we live therefore, or die,
we are the Lord's.

— *St. Paul*

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